

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

12th/13th November 1983

The 24th annual autumn census of Greylag Anser anser and Pink-footed Geese A. brachyrhynchus was held over the weekend of 12th/13th November 1983. Both species experienced only moderate breeding success in 1983, but while the number of Greylags rose only slightly, from 80,000 in November 1982 to 82,000 in November 1983, the Pinkfoot total rose much more, from 89,000 to 101,000.

The numbers of geese found roosting in each region and district of Scotland, and each county of England, are set out in the table below, together with the figures for the previous two years. The individual totals have been rounded to the nearest 10, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1000. Where possible, feral flocks of Greylags have been omitted.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	8 Nov 1981	14 Nov 1982	13 Nov 1983	8 Nov 1981	14 Nov 1982	13 Nov 1983
Orkney	160	600	680	-	-	-
Highland						
Caithness	4300	4140	7450	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	20	3130 810	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	27400	8510	1070 7180	-	-	40
Inverness	5300	720	500	-	-	-
Nairn	10	70	-	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	-	310	410 450	-	-	-
Grampian						
Moray	1580	2480	810 1030	-	-	-
Banff & Buchan	2750	11400	5600	5900	6200	2850
Gordon	6440	5040	7020 11420	7300	6500	10700
Kincardine & Deeside	3980	10000	6000 11700	-	-	-
Tayside						
Angus	2950	3360	7900 9610	3400	11150	13220
Perth & Kinross	15030	16900	18230 18460	15530	16050	14260
Central						
Stirling	1080	1050	250 300	2500	5440	3730
Fife	2250	90	1250 3130	6150	920	8000
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	2790	1670	3570 3790	-	-	-
Cunningham	150	100	130 620	-	-	-
Renfrew	140	-	50	-	-	-
Dumbarton	250	400	350	50	-	-
Strathkelvin	40	70	150	-	-	-
Lanark	-	200	-	940	1220	290
Kyle & Carrick	460	350	490 180	-	-	-
Lothian						
West Lothian	2140	730	1980 2030	230	-	2000
Midlothian	230	740	930 1110	8500	2120	13600
East Lothian	840	390	720 780	4510	6230	3420
Borders						
Tweeddale	10	-	30	12340	9310	3600
Berwickshire	820	200	580 910	1000	1320	3340
Roxburgh	3950	1510	3850	440	120	1800

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	8 Nov 1981	14 Nov 1982	13 Nov 1983	8 Nov 1981	14 Nov 1982	13 Nov 1983
Dumries & Galloway						
Wigtown	2190	2600	3320 3150	160	-	-
Stewartry	740	1880	1900 1600	-	-	-
Nithsdale	310	800	300	2210	1860	2620
Northumberland	4130	3850	2300 3700	-	30	80
Cumbria	1300	450	800	20	-	20
Lancashire	-	-	-	18240	18410	16280
Humberside	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	530	1850	1270
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TOTAL	96000	80000	82000	90000	89000	101000
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			102,030			12550

Weather and general conditions

That bane of goose counters, fog, hung over much of eastern Scotland in the days before the count weekend and though, thankfully, it had largely dispersed during the Friday, generally murky conditions prevailed in some areas, with low overcast and some drizzle, making both dawn and dusk flights difficult. Certainly in central eastern and south-eastern Scotland observers expressed considerable cautions about the accuracy of their counts. Further north in Scotland, and from south-west Scotland southwards into England, conditions were much better, often bright, clear and sunny.

Thanks to the fine, hot summer, the harvest in most areas had been early and clean, though there were exceptions with the occasional stubble field obviously proving very attractive. Ploughing had therefore been possible from an early autumn date and this was combined with a very noticeable increase in the acreage of autumn-sown barley. Farmers were expressing great satisfaction with their sowings of this crop in autumn 1982 and a number that I spoke to were maintaining or increasing their sowings this autumn, in one or two cases doubling the acreage. Although during the time of the census only a few geese seemed to be feeding on the well-sprouted barley shoots, this is another potential area of conflict between farmers and the geese.

GREYLAGS

The census total shows a slight increase, of only 2000, over the previous autumn, certainly not a significant one. The percentage of young birds, in a sample of just over 3000, was 16.8% and the mean brood size 2.2 (n=85). This might have been expected to have led to a rather greater increase in total numbers, and it may be that the poor counting conditions in some areas led to birds being missed. Certainly the distribution was rather different this year with many fewer birds in the north of Scotland where it was very apparent that there was little food for them. The table opposite gives the percentage regional distribution.

A comparison of this autumn's total with that for last spring, when we counted 53,000, would seem to strongly confirm that the latter was much too low, presumably due to our not finding all the birds.

PINKFEET

The total of 101,000 is a new record. It is rather higher than expected as the breeding success was not all that good, with 15.9% young in a sample of over 4000, plus a low mean brood size of 1.7 (n=105). However, bearing in mind the March 1983 count which seemed to indicate low winter mortality, it is, on balance, acceptable.

The regional distribution, tabled below, shows a particularly high concentration in south-east Scotland, with the largest drop in north England.

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in November 1981-1983

Figures are percentages of total populations

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	1981	1982	1983	1981	1982	1983
North Scotland	56.2	54.1	40.1	14.7	14.3	13.4
East central Scotland	22.3	26.8	33.9	30.7	37.8	38.8
South-east Scotland	7.5	3.6	9.9	30.0	21.5	27.5
South-west Scotland	8.4	10.1	12.3	3.7	3.5	2.9
North England	5.6	5.4	3.8	20.3	20.8	16.2
East England	-	-	-	0.6	2.1	1.2

Spring census

The third in the new series of spring grey goose censuses will be held over the weekend 17th/18th March 1984. I will be circulating details during February.

Acknowledgements

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